

VZCZCXRO1725  
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM  
DE RUEHJA #1317/01 1900902  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 080902Z JUL 08  
FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9480  
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS PRIORITY  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5192  
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 2730  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1104  
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1065  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1974  
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 3875  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2188  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN  
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 2810  
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 2784  
RUEHBA/AMCONSUL PERTH 0935  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 001317

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EUR/WE, DRL, DRL/IRF  
NSC FOR E.PHU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/08/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [SOCI](#) [ID](#) [VT](#)

SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM -- CARDINAL EXPRESSES SOME  
CONCERNS

REF: JAKARTA 1143

JAKARTA 00001317 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Cardinal Darmaatmadja, the senior Catholic prelate in Indonesia, told Pol/C that he was "deeply concerned" by the Indonesian government's recent decree constraining the religious activities of an Islamic sect. He said he was concerned that the religious freedom climate could deteriorate somewhat in the lead-up to elections in 2009 as politicians tried to placate extremists. That said, the Cardinal was optimistic about Indonesia in the longer term, rejecting the notion of "creeping Islamization." He said he had invited Pope Benedict XVI to visit Indonesia, but there was no confirmation at this point. Bio-data on Darmaatmadja is attached in para 8. END SUMMARY.

A LOW-KEY FIGURE

12. (C) On July 8, Pol/C met Julius Cardinal Darmaatmadja, Indonesia's senior Catholic prelate (and only cardinal). The meeting took place at the national offices of the Catholic Church next to the Cathedral of the Ascension of Saint Mary in central Jakarta. (Note: Catholics in Indonesia represent roughly 4 percent of the population with Protestants representing another 5-6 percent. With many wealthy Chinese Indonesian adherents, the Church has a relatively prominent role in society.) The Cardinal was dressed informally in a cotton batik shirt and carried a wooden rosary in his hand. As is his style, he was very low-key and soft-spoken in manner.

CONCERNS IN THE SHORT- TO MID-TERM

13. (C) Pol/C asked the Cardinal for his views regarding religious freedom in Indonesia in light of the GOI's recent decree regarding the Muslim Ahmadiyah sect. (Note: On June 9, the GOI--citing concerns about law and order--announced that Ahmadiyah could not proselytize and conduct religious activities that in any way deviated from Sunni orthodox Islam--see reftel.) The Cardinal commented that he

personally opposed the decree and thought that Ahmadiyah should be allowed to practice freely "as faith is a natural right guaranteed to all by the (Indonesian) Constitution." The government, however, had come under "immense pressure" from Islamic groups to ban the group and had basically given in to that demand short of actually declaring that the group was illegal. The Catholic Church had not publicly complained about the GOI's action, but had expressed its concerns in private.

¶4. (C) Darmaatmadja said he was concerned that the religious freedom climate in Indonesia could deteriorate somewhat in the lead-up to the legislative and presidential elections in ¶2009. He worried that extremist Muslims would try to pressure moderate Muslims and also non-Muslim religious groups in various ways. It was possible, for example, that extremists would demand that the GOI stop giving licenses for the creation of new churches. As had happened in the case of the Ahmadiyah, he worried that political leaders--focused on the election--would try to placate extremist groups and not work to defend religious freedoms. He had great respect for President Yudhoyono, but the President was "operating per the political calendar and that was just the way it was."

#### GENERALLY OPTIMISTIC

¶5. (C) All that said, the Cardinal was generally optimistic about Indonesia in the longer term, rejecting the notion of "creeping Islamization." While some Indonesian Muslims were on the extreme edge and affected by radical thinking emanating from the Middle East, the vast majority of Muslims were moderate and overwhelmingly tolerant of differences. He noted that Christians, Buddhists and Hindus essentially had

JAKARTA 00001317 002.2 OF 002

little problem practicing their faith. He said there was "no prospect" of Indonesia ending its official secular status and becoming an Islamic state -- "there is no support for such a path."

¶6. (C) He commented that the Catholic Church maintained close links with major Muslim groups Nahdhalatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, groups which he said "went out of their way to extend the hand of friendship to other faiths." To underline how well he thought religions got along, he pointed out the window to Istiqlal Mosque, remarking that "they are good neighbors." (Note: The mosque is the largest in Indonesia. It was designed by an Indonesian Christian.)

#### POPE BENEDICT XVI

¶7. (C) Darmaatmadja related that he had invited Pope Benedict to visit Indonesia as part of his upcoming travels to Australia for World Youth Day. Unfortunately, such a visit could not be worked into the Pope's schedule. The Cardinal said he was still urging the Curia to plan for such a visit and "to focus more attention on Catholics in the developing world." There was no confirmation at this time that a Papal visit might be arranged any time soon. (Note: The last such visit to Indonesia was by Pope John Paul II in 1989.)

#### BIO-DATA

¶8. (SBU) Darmaatmadja, 73, was designated a cardinal in 1994 by Pope John Paul II. He has been a bishop since 1983 and--before he became a cardinal--had responsibility for pastoral care of Catholics serving in the security forces. He is from Central Java and is of Javanese ethnicity. He is a member of the Jesuit order. He studied theology in Indonesia and India. The Cardinal has a serious eye condition related to his retinas and has been to Boston for medical treatment.

HUME